

Canton may be restaurant's next port of call

By CAROLYN LEUNG

The Shatin Floating Restaurant, which has been sited in no less than eight locations during the past 21 years, looks set to weigh anchor once again.

And the next port of call for the brightly decorated restaurant may be Canton — a move forced on the owners by lack of Government co-operation, they claim.

And its replacement further along the coast will be a "floating" restaurant — on dryland.

The restaurant's manager, Mr Chu Keung, said each move along the Shing Mun River has been forced by the Government because it wanted to develop adjacent areas on the river bank.

Mr Chu said: "We have to get a licence from the Marine Department before we can anchor in the river and also have to rent a piece of coastal land from the Lands Office to convert it into a car park.

"If the Government terminates the lease and withdraws the land, we have no option but to move.

"There can be no business without a car park."

The lease for the restaurant's present parking site actually expired in August.

The land has already been allocated to the Hongkong

Amateur Rowing Association, which receives subsidies and sponsorship mainly from the Government and the Royal Hongkong Jockey Club.

The restaurant owners have been able to continue to use the car park under an agreement with the association — but that deal will not last long.

The rowing organisation plans to build a large training centre on the land by the end of this year.

Until the new building is completed, the rowers will continue to use their present headquarters — a barrack-type tin hut located near the floating restaurant.

The association has been using the temporary training centre for more than two years.

A spokesman for the Lands Office said the Government had never asked the restaurant to move, but she added that under development plans for Shatin, the whole stretch of the Shing Mun River in the new town will eventually be turned into a sports and recreation area.

"The area along the river will be converted into a town park, similar to the one at Tsimshatsui East," said the spokesman.

"We are very much concerned about the pollution problem caused by the float-

ing restaurant and there are plans to alleviate it.

"One of the ways is to build a permanent look-alike floating restaurant further along the coast.

"This new restaurant will be different from the old one because its sewage pipes will be linked to the underground sewage system," said the spokesman.

"Also, we are going to build a large underwater sewage pipe under the channel leading to Tolo Harbour.

"When it is completed, it will be very difficult for the old floating restaurant to move out of the channel.

"Under these circumstances, the restaurant has to go."

The site for the new "floating" restaurant will be open for tender in September.

The area of the site is about 7,500 square metres.

Mr Chu claimed the Government has promised the owners of the present restaurant preference in the tender, but this was denied by the Lands Office spokesman.

"It is open for everybody," she said.

Because of previous problems caused by dealings with the Government, Mr Chu said the owners may now not bother to bid.

The constant swapping of sites has cost the restaurant many hundreds of thousands



On the move again — Shatin's famous floating restaurant.

of dollars over the years, according to Mr Ho Ban-cheung, the proprietor.

"Although the restaurant floats, there are eight giant metal chains underneath linking it to anchor stones deeply embedded in the river bed.

"Each time we move, we have to unearth the anchor stones, draw the metal chains and tow the boat to the new site.

"That costs us at least \$400,000 each time.

"And we also have to rent a new site and convert it into a car park.

"There is no compensation of any kind."

Mr Ho said they have approached the Government many times for a permanent site in Shatin, but with no success.

He said plans had also been considered to move away from Shatin — but, again, the restaurant had received little support from officials.

"We had thought of mov-

ing to Tuen Mun, but the Marine Department refused to give us a licence there unless we renewed the boat.

"We also considered moving to Sai Kung, Castle Peak Bay or Macau, but these ideas were also dropped."

The Marine Department refused to answer any questions relating to the licence of the Shatin Floating Restaurant.

The latest scheme being considered by Mr Ho is to move the business to Canton.

"I think we will get better business in Canton," said Mr Chu, who also recalled the history of the popular restaurant.

"It was set up in 1963 near Ho Tung Mansion.

"But we were asked by the Government to move because they wanted to develop the area around the mansion.

"We moved to a location near Sai Lam Temple.

"At that time, Shatin was still very rural and Taipo Road was the only main link.

"Everyone who used the road could see the restaurant.

"From Sai Lam Temple, we moved to the site facing the Lung Wah Restaurant.

"Actually, we moved around that area twice before moving to Lek Yuen.

"From Lek Yuen, we moved to where the Shatin public swimming pool is located now and then moved again to the place next to the present site."

He said trade in recent years has been hit by the construction of the new town.

"There was too much construction work noise and dust," said Mr Chu.

And now the business is forced to compete with many land-based restaurants.

"It is true that Shatin is more populous now, but most of the residents are very economical," he said.

Mr Chu said the floating restaurant has always been a feature of Shatin and its closure would be a loss to the area.